

over the work's upper- and lower-bisected composition. The window idea doesn't completely work, however, and one might have wondered why the artist didn't simply opt for a larger single sheet of paper. The same could be said for the six-part *Neptune V*, which tries too earnestly to re-create the effect of a cathedral window.

Still, there was the show's curious riddle of the two Davids. And why David Gilmour? The five oil portraits, *David Gilmour I–V*, portrayed a young musician in his heyday. Painted in thinned-out shades of lavender, magenta, cadmium red, and robin's-egg blue, the medium-size works are closely cropped head shots showing Gilmour's shoulder-length auburn hair and pensive facial expressions, as if he were lost in the ether of his own stardom and mythology. Now seventy-two, Gilmour continues to record and tour. Hu Zi equates Gilmour's humanitarian, political, and social activism with a near-godlike strength, comparing him to Michelangelo's biblical underdog, slayer of Philistines and monument to virility and masculine beauty. This is a rather far-fetched suggestion. Gilmour is flesh and blood; Michelangelo's five-hundred-year-old, six-ton chunk of marble has continued to captivate the imaginations of the masses since its creation.

One would be hard-pressed to ignore Hu Zi's obvious debt to Western counterparts: Francesco Clemente and Elizabeth Peyton readily come to mind. That said, Hu Zi clearly seems to be pushing toward greater individuality in style and content. While she continues to build a career by vicariously reliving the lives of her musical and artistic idols, she might consider riskier, less taciturn ground—that of vulnerability, allowing for an unflinching and raw personification of both self and soul. By doing so, she might also make a more defiant claim on those conflicting and sometimes fragile dichotomies concerning power and beauty. I believe it was Kafka who said, “Anyone who keeps the ability to see beauty never grows old.”

—Arthur Solway

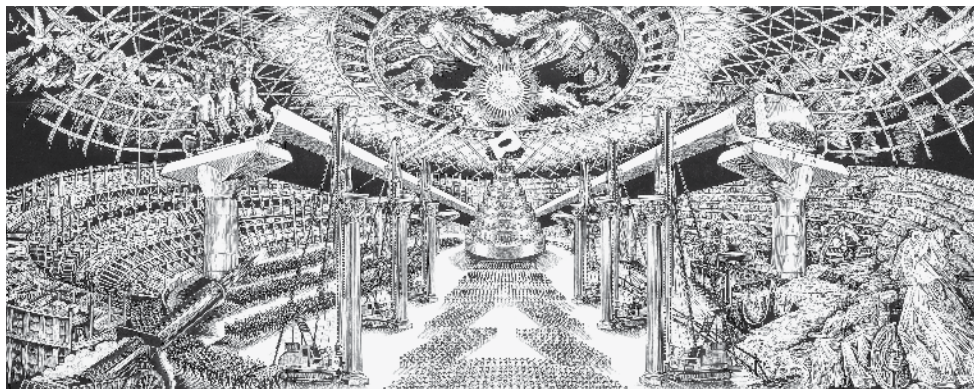
SAITAMA, JAPAN

Sachiko Kazama

MARUKI GALLERY FOR THE HIROSHIMA PANELS

Printmaker Sachiko Kazama intended to exhibit works parodying links between sports and militarism at the Fuchu Art Museum last year under the rubric “Dyslympics,” but the museum convinced her to change that title, for as an institution operated by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, it is officially committed to supporting the 2020 Games. When Kazama was invited to revisit the subject for a solo show at the Maruki Gallery for the Hiroshima Panels, a plucky private museum outside of Tokyo with tenacious lefty roots and a decades-long commitment to peace education, she took the opportunity to go bigger than ever.

She created the feature work, *Dyslympics 2680*, 2018, specifically for this show. At roughly eight by twenty-one feet, it is Kazama's largest work to date. As a black-and-white monotype printed from twenty-eight different woodblocks carved over the course of just fifty-five days, it is itself something of an Olympic feat. Japan was to have hosted its first Olympiad in 1940, but the event was canceled after the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937. Those games would have marked the twenty-six hundredth anniversary of the legendary founding of Japan by its first emperor. Via a mélange of iconography derived from the histories of architecture, Western art and literature, and Japanese comics, *Dyslympics 2680* imagines the opening ceremonies of the 2020 Olympics (eighty years after 1940/2600) as the belated fruition of the fascistic dreams of Japan's right-wing leadership and its supporters within the all-powerful construction industry. Many of the work's motifs relate to the defunct National Eugenic Law, also passed in



Sachiko Kazama, *Dyslympics 2680*, 2018, woodcut, 7' 11½" × 21'.

1940—for instance, a tiered cylinder (derived from Dante's *Purgatorio*) displaying athletic female bodies engaged in nude gymnastic exercises, and a large parade of people divided by caste, with the lowest buried in the cement as *hitobashira* (human pillars), in a performance of an ancient ritual to appease the gods. The imaginary venue's basic architecture derives from the Kyocera Dome Osaka and the New National Stadium being constructed in Tokyo; it also recalls that perennial symbol of human hubris, Bruegel's *Tower of Babel*, 1563.

The two other works in the show were much smaller, and were originally created for the show at the Fuchu Art Museum. *Baron Kindai Gosho Maro in Iwo Jima*, 2017, another woodblock monotype, portrays Colonel Baron Takeichi Nishi, an equestrian gold medalist in the 1932 Los Angeles Olympics and later a Japanese Imperial Army officer who was killed during the Battle of Iwo Jima in 1945. He is depicted in elaborate battle armor inspired by pentathlon sports equipment, on a horse outfitted like a World War II-era tank. *Human Mt. Fuji*, 2017, is of black marker on aluminum foil (“fake silver,” according to the artist) attached to sliding-door panels (*fusuma*). It suggests that contemporary forms of youth socialization harken back to the era of Japanese militarism: A group of children form an eight-level human pyramid against a backdrop of Mount Fuji, surrounded by old wooden army buildings, historical and contemporary Japanese tanks, and the never-developed Fugaku, a Japanese heavy bomber designed to obliterate America.

Over the past decade, political woodcuts have experienced a revival in Japan. While many lefty artists and scholars tend to fetishize the act of carving blocks as a nostalgic return to an era preceding the rise of mass culture, Kazama elevates the medium as a viable way to make showstopping tableaux, as demonstrated in triennials at Tokyo's Mori Art Museum, in 2013, and in Yokohama, in 2017. A classic lone-wolf genius in the studio with an open affection for popular culture, she offers through her practice a way to bridge the gap between the hoary activist art of yesteryear and the business and media ecology of post-Superflat Japanese art. I hear her next project is a graphic novel—I can't wait! I just hope it doesn't end up as an overpriced art book. It's one thing to stick it to the man in the confines of the art world, another to stick it in his eye in public.

—Ryan Holmberg

TAIPEI

“(Not) Just a Historical Document”

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

“The name of the game is Dialogue,” an expressionless female face tells us in a booming robotic voice. The rules of the game are simple, but bear repeating for the sake of emphasis: Keep playing and keep talking;

keep playing and keep talking. “Let us now begin our dialogue,” she says, piquing our curiosity. “You’ve lost.”

At first, Danny Ning Tsun Yung’s single-channel video *Game*, 1986, appears to suggest that debate, dialogue, and reasoning are the origin of game logic. However, as the video continues and the participant loses no matter what, this absurd game points to the meaninglessness of the endeavor and the absence of logic. Yung’s was one of twenty radical yet relatively unknown video works shown in the exhibition “(Not) Just a Historical Document: Hong Kong–Taiwan Video Art 1980–1990s,” the show’s title a wry nod to China calling the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984 just “a historical document” at the twentieth anniversary of the handover of Hong Kong in 2017. The show’s staging the show at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Taipei was a reminder that though both Taipei and Hong Kong challenge the idea of a unitary China, Taipei is currently the more open space. The exhibition, therefore, offered a candid insight into the differences in power and perspective across the region during key historical moments.

Shu Lea Cheang’s five-channel video installation *Making News Making History—Live from Tiananmen Square*, 1989, placed footage from student protests and statistics on China Central Television’s monopoly of the media next to dreamy animations and disconnected subtitles such as *IS THE END AN ABSURDIST PLAY ABSURD?* and *WE ARE NOW LABELLED COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY*. One of the works responding most immediately to the 1989 massacre, the installation shows Cheang’s using an absurdist narrative to look at the brutality of this single catastrophic event. Ellen Pau’s poetic single-channel video *Blue*, 1989–90, reminiscent of post–World War II playwrights’ response to the trauma of Hiroshima, draws similarly on the absurd. On a small television monitor we see miniature explosions in blue, some with electric energy, illuminated at their fringes like fireworks, others softer and slower, like the billowing mushroom clouds formed by nuclear bombs. The screen fades, a train rushes by, a figure floats like an apparition, and all the while a funereal lament can be heard in the background.



Shu Lea Cheang, *Making News Making History—Live from Tiananmen Square*, 1989, five-channel video, color, sound, 30 minutes.

In his 2017 essay “Delayed Plasticity: A Preliminary Investigation of the Political Criticism of Sinophone Single-Channel Video Art in the 1980s,” curator Sing Song-Yong tells us that the audiovisual material for Pau’s video came from Zuni Icosahedron, an experimental theater group founded in 1982 that both Pau and Yung were part of. Many of Zuni’s members also helped to stage the First International Video Art Festival in Hong Kong in 1983. This fact reminds us of the degree to which performance and media influenced each other in Hong Kong as elsewhere. More specifically, we are able to trace how video became the medium of choice for artists wielding absurdism and activism as

responses to the uncertainty and rising nationalism of the times. These cross-connections add nuance to our understanding of art history, but also reveal the complex trajectories that shaped the multiple versions of China that exist right now. In marginal and niche activities we somehow find unexpected answers to critical questions such as “What is China?” and “Where is China today?”

—Jyoti Dhar

LAGOS, NIGERIA

Andrew Esiebo

RELE GALLERY

In Accra, Ghana; Lagos, Nigeria; or Dakar, Senegal; beneath bridges under construction, on market streets choked with carts, merchants, and customers, in open palace courtyards, at dusk, on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean, glory is a round leather ball kicked successfully into a net—even if the ball is a makeshift version formed of crumpled paper or tin cans bound together by tape. Little children, teenagers, or young adults are usually the players. They are following the tradition of a sport beloved across the continent. They toss the ball in the air, move it nimbly among themselves, on concrete or sand, in thick vegetation, or on planks and other surfaces that otherwise don’t lend themselves to good soccer.

In his cleverly titled exhibition “Goal Diggers,” Nigerian photojournalist Andrew Esiebo moved the sport to an even unlikelier surface: the gallery wall. In color photographs set in contrasting frames of burnished brown wood, Esiebo captures these scenes and tests the limits of what’s known as “the beautiful game.” Who really gets to enjoy soccer, and where and how? In Esiebo’s images, kids play between open shop stalls holding items that could break when met with the force of a kicked ball, or on a beach where wayward waves constantly threaten to take away the ball and perhaps even the players.

Esiebo’s work indirectly comments on the problems of urban planning in his chosen cities, where the construction of yet another government office building might be favored over the addition of recreational facilities. And if such facilities were to be built, they may be inaccessible, guarded, under lock and key. Who, then, has access to this beautiful game, a game so often said to be democratic, open to all across political or racial divides?

Esiebo’s exhibition coincided with the start of the FIFA World Cup—this year held in Russia—and the whole world was supposed to see itself represented there. Games were played in stadiums that cost more than \$300 million to build, though rumors say the true figure may be much higher. Most of the players who attract global attention trained in elite European soccer academies. In the tournament, Europe was guaranteed thirteen slots. Africa, with a similar number of countries, was allotted only five. The prevailing argument was that Europe has more competent teams and should therefore have more representation. But how many African countries—impoverished by their own leadership, as well as by historical colonial exploitation by European powers—have \$300 million to spend on a stadium or funds to support academies? Although there have been exceptions to the rule—low-income neighborhoods and impossible circumstances have produced stars such as the Nigerian defender Taribo West, who helped his country win gold at the 1996 Summer Olympics—the academies of wealthier countries are always going to be more likely to produce star players such as David de Gea or Cristiano Ronaldo.

Shot between 2006 and 2018 as an exploratory project, Esiebo’s images capture moments that are usually fleeting, such as the celebration of a goal, or a badly timed tackle and the resulting injury. Esiebo